A

STATEMENT

OF

THE ORIGIN, PROGRESS, AND PRESENT DESIGN

OF THE

SOCIETY OF INQUIRY

RESPECTING

MISSIONS,

OF THE

THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

ESTABLISHED AT PRINCETON, NEW JERSEY.

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1817.

A STATEMENT, &c.

WHEN an Association of men solicit the patronage of an enlightened public, it is expected that the design of this solicitation, as well as the object for which they are associated, should be distinctly stated. In both these respects we feel willing to give all the satisfaction in our power.

On the first day of March, A. D. 1814, a number of young men, members of the Theological Seminary of the Presbyterian Church of the United States, met for the purpose of forming an association, the object of which, as stated in the preamble of the constitution then adopted, we shall give in their own words.

"Desirous of obtaining important information re-
"specting domestic and foreign missions, with a
"view of ascertaining our personal duty as to enga-
"ging in them; desirous also of being made ac-
"quainted with the state of religion in our own
"and other countries, we agree to form ourselves
"into an association, for the above purposes, to be
"known by the name of the *Society of Inquiry Re-*
"*specting Missions, and the General State of Religion.*"

From that time till the present, the Society has uniformly convened, and held its regular stated meetings, during the sessions of the Seminary, on the first day of every month, except when it interferes with the Sabbath; in that case, it is postponed till

the succeeding Monday. The officers of the Society are, a president, vice-president, secretary to record the minutes of each meeting, corresponding secretary to answer ordinary communications to the Society, a treasurer, librarian, and a standing committee of three, to superintend the affairs of the Society.

The exercises of the Society are conducted in the following order:—After the meeting is opened with prayer, by the presiding officer, each member is called upon in turn, to communicate any recent intelligence he may have received concerning the state of religion either at home or abroad. This is also the time in which the Society attend to any miscellaneous business. The regular business of each meeting is, first, to attend to a report read by one of the members on a subject assigned at the last stated meeting. Each member performs this duty in turn, as their names stand on the roll. The subjects usually assigned, are condensed histories of the rise, progress, and present state of some foreign mission, or abstracts of works on the same subjects. These reports, after receiving the corrections and approbation of the Society, are deposited in the library.

The Society then proceeds to the discussion of some subject connected with missions, which was also assigned at the preceding meeting. The stated business being ended, it is then concluded with prayer. Our design in these exercises, has been in part mentioned.

It is first, to store our minds with knowledge on

missionary subjects—To ascertain the situation of Heathen nations, and the prospects of success in spreading the Gospel among them; as well as the want of the destitute parts of our own country.

And secondly, our grand design is, that by thus ascertaining the wants of our fellow men, and discoursing upon them with each other, the spirit of missionaries may be enkindled, and cherished amongst us. That thus each may assist to fan in the bosom of his fellow, that flame which burnt with such fervent zeal in the breasts of the apostles, and early Christians: a flame which the blood of a host of martyrs could not quench. The spirit which we endeavour to excite, and to cherish in our little association, is the same which led a Luther, a Calvin, a Knox, and a Cranmer, to bid defiance to the church of Rome, when at the height of its power, and enabled the last to seal his testimony with his blood. It is the same spirit, which in more modern times, animated a Swartz, and a Vanderkemp, and now warms the hearts of Carey, Morrison, Newel, and their worthy associates. And it is a spirit which we trust will continue to glow with increasing and inextinguishable ardour, until none need say to his brother, "know thou the Lord." The cause of missions is one, in which lukewarmness finds no place. It is the cause of our race, the cause of millions perishing for lack of knowledge, the cause of human happiness, the cause of God.

With these objects in view we appear before a Christian public. We disclaim all sectarian, and party principles and prejudices. The spirit which

we seek to cherish, is Catholic as the spirit of missions itself. Our object in this appeal is to solicit funds, and books on missionary subjects, the manuscript journals of missionaries, &c. to increase the library of our infant Society. We make the appeal to all our brethren in Christ, without regard to sect, or name; and to our reverend fathers in the ministry in particular. We know that their prayer on our behalf, and on behalf of all whose prospects are similar to ours, is that we may be faithful, and accomplished ministers of the New Testament. The surest way to obtain these qualifications by the grace of God, and the assistance of his holy spirit, is, in connection with our Theological studies, to make ourselves acquainted with the religious and moral state of the world. Being thus furnished, we will be better qualified to decide on the important question, what is duty, as it concerns ourselves, and where our exertions may be made with most advantage. Whether abroad, as foreign missionaries, as travelling missionaries in our own country, or as settled pastors of congregations? In either case, to have considerable information on these subjects, must enlarge the sphere of our usefulness in the church, and may, under the blessing of God, give a tone of disinterestedness and zeal to our labours through life. But our means of obtaining this knowledge, are comparatively very limited. Our library is small, and from the nature of the collection it contains, affords few materials, either for reading, or reports on the subject of missions. From the Christian public, we hope to receive the means of increasing our library,

and consequently affording a larger field for improvement.*

Whilst we look with tender solicitude to the future prosperity and usefulness of our beloved society, we would not pass in silence, mercies and favours already received. Truly we can say "thus far the Lord hath helped us," and hath granted prosperity, both to our association and the institution of which we are members, beyond what even the most sanguine dared to hope. When this society was first formed, the whole number of students in the Theological Seminary was twenty-one.—Twenty of these became, and continued members of this society, while their connection with the seminary lasted.

* That the public may not mistake our meaning, we add, as has been already hinted, that we wish to collect all the information on missionary subjects, which we can procure. Besides the means of purchasing books, the Society freely solicits donations from individuals, and other societies disposed to favour its interests. Any thing which may tend to throw light on the religious and moral state of the world, will be thankfully received, and deposited in the library, with the name, and residence of the donor. Connected with the subject of missions, we regard history, both ancient and modern, voyages, travels, &c. with maps, charts, and statistical views of different countries. Histories of missions, foreign and domestic, and journals of missionaries, in print or manuscript, either in our own, or foreign languages. The lives of persons distinguished for their piety, or exertions in the cause of truth. Authentic narratives of the exertions made at different times, to christianize and civilize the original inhabitants of our country. The first establishment of Christian churches in the different parts of our land, with the names of the first pastors in these churches. Reports of missionary, bible, and tract societies, and all other institutions which have for their object the spread of evangelical truth.

Since that period, our number has rapidly increased; and from the fruits which have already appeared, we are justified in forming high hopes of future benefit from our association. Two classes, one consisting of eleven, the other of fifteen members, have passed through the prescribed course of study in this seminary. Two of these are now under the direction of the board of foreign missions, waiting to be transported to the field of their future labours among the heathen. Nine others have been, or are now employed on domestic missions for a longer or shorter period of time, in the destitute parts of our own country. The remainder are settled as pastors of congregations, or labouring in the vineyard as their master directs. In our communications with them, from time to time, all acknowledge the important benefit they derived from this society, and exhort us in the most affectionate manner, to watch over its interests.

Our present number is forty-eight, all members of the Theological Seminary of the Presbyterian Church, though individually attached to different denominations of professing Christians. We fondly hope that the spirit of missions has not departed with our brethren, who have entered on the work. Many of us look forward to the time as not far distant, when we shall be made the honoured instruments of carrying the Gospel to those, who are now strangers to its cheering sound.

To those generous individuals who have favoured us with contributions, in money or books, we return our thanks. However small in their own estimations their donations may have been, they are im-

portant to us, not only as additions to our previous little stock, but also as marks of their Christian love.

To the board of missions of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, we present our acknowledgments for the use so generously granted us, of the manuscript journals of their missionaries, the field of whose labours has been in different parts of our own country.

We acknowledge with gratitude, the notice and favour of that venerable institution, the London Missionary Society. By sending us copies of all their annual reports, at a time when our respective countries were at war with each other, they gave us a pledge of their good will. Their gift was dear to us, as it afforded a pleasing evidence of the noble and benign spirit of our holy religion; which overlooks the rancour of political animosities, and embraces even political enemies, as spiritual brethren. It is an evidence, that the spirit of Christ differs much from the spirit of the world, and that when its blessed influence shall be felt, and obeyed by all, will cause men to live together in unity and peace, having no other desires than to promote the interests of their common Lord.

Fellow Christians, though our means of acquiring knowledge on the interesting subjects our society contemplate, fall far short of our desires, still we can learn enough over which to weep, and to pray. If we cast our eyes over the four quarters of the world, what a deplorable moral waste do we every where behold. *Africa* with her millions of benighted inhabitants, still builds altars to *Devils*, still offers the sacrifice of cruelty and uncleanness, to gods who can

neither hear, nor see, nor save. The light of the Gospel which shines in the country of the *Hottentots*, appears only like a faint taper amidst this lamentable night of moral darkness. In the elevation of the degraded Hottentot to the rank and character of a man, we see what the faithful preaching of the Gospel can effect. By the blessing of God, it is calculated to enlighten, to civilize, and sanctify wherever it is sent. But the rest of *Africa* stands the monument of the Christian's shame, for the little that has been done to dispel the thick darkness in which it is enveloped. The hundreds of millions of *Asia* are still encircled with the hideous mantle of idolatry and superstition. Still does the deluded *Mahomedan*, dream of a paradise of sensual bliss. Still does the bewildered *Hindoo* offer human victims to the supposed spirit of the Ganges, or pour out his blood beneath the car of *Juggernaut*. The distant Islands, peopled by myriads of human beings, have not yet learned the praises of our God.—The native inhabitants of our own country are still involved in all the horrors of heathenism. Still does the Indian on our frontier offer sacrifices to the god of war, and invoke the ghosts of his fathers. Still does he expect an eternal abode in the bosom of some delightful forest, where neither the arts nor the vices of the white man shall ever extend, to disturb his tranquility and repose. There he hopes to meet his brave and beloved ancestors, and join with them in those pursuits which are here most congenial to his savage disposition. The condition of these wretched beings calls for our pity, as men; it demands more; it requires our exertions as Christians, on their behalf. Vice,

disease, and the sword, have reduced their once numerous and formidable tribes, to their present miserable remains. They are permitted to see the blessings which Christianity, and civilization confer on others, without being permitted to partake of their enjoyments. They have long had reason to say, no one careth for our souls. Although they live in the borders of a land blessed with the religion of Jesus, yet they are left to wander and grope in the mazes of ignorance and superstition. Few, and feeble have been the endeavours to guide them to the holy hill of Zion, and point them to the "Lamb of God, who taketh away the sins of the world." The spirit of genuine love to them, and unwearied exertion on their behalf, appears to have taken its flight from our churches, with the spirit of the apostolic *Brainard.* Our own country, though highly favoured in respect to civil and religious privileges, is in many parts destitute of the ordinances, and means of grace. Many congregations in the Atlantic states, are destitute of pastors; and the rapid increase of population, affords materials for the formation of many more if learned and zealous ministers were sent amongst them. The whole of that immense country, stretching from the shores of the north-western lakes, to the mouth of the Mississippi, including five states, and four territories, with a population of three millions, and increasing beyond a parallel, does not on a liberal estimate contain more than one qualified clergyman for ten thousand inhabitants. Society in that country is acquiring regularity and polish; but there are few to lead, in forming and organizing societies for the worship of God. "The fields" in

that quarter, "are white for the harvest," but the labourers are few, very few.

Permit us then, in concluding, to solicit your patronage, not only to our association, the object of which we have stated, but also to the seminary of which we are members; one grand design of which, according to its constitution, is to train up missionaries to the heathen, and to such as are destitute of the stated preaching of the Gospel. The work of evangelizing the world is one in which angels would gladly participate. Is it possible then, that they who are under higher and more sacred obligations than those exalted beings; who are purchased with the blood of the Son of God, can feel indifferent in regard to this matter? It cannot be. All who love the Lord Jesus Christ pray constantly and fervently, that the knowledge of him may be universal. "But "how shall they believe in him, of whom they have "not heard? and how shall they hear without a "preacher?"

The preaching of the Gospel is the means instituted by the great head of the church, for ushering in that glorious day, so long the subject of prophecy and prayer, "when the wilderness, and the solitary place shall be glad for them; and the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose."

On behalf of the Society,

WILLIAM MACFARLANE,
SYMMES C. HENRY,
Committee.

N. B. All communications to be addressed to *The Society of Inquiry Respecting Missions, Princeton, New-Jersey.*